Pattern of Life

The pioneer of the popular mind is doubtless one of the most familiar characters in American folklore. Who has not admired his unpolished figure? Who has not thrilled to his intense love of freedom, his frank manner and his exuberant courage? He has become a tradition, a cherished generalization, a Lochinvar in buckskin. He is a makeshift personality in the old, old world. He belongs to no particular frontier—yet he belongs to many. No matter to what period of frontier history he is assigned, his costume is usually an anachronism; no matter on what frontier he lives, he seldom adheres to his environment. He is one man—and any man.

This idealized figure has been depicted by many writers as perhaps the happiest of mankind. Exercise and excitement give him health. Brilliant hopes of future wealth intensify his efforts. And common danger makes him interdependent with his fellows and yet unflinchingly courageous. Moving in a limitless world, he feels for his neighbor little of the envy which engendered so much misery in older societies. He sits around a log fire or on a puncheon stool, giving the world some of its heartiest laughter. His fiddle is heard with more delight than was Apollo’s lyre.

Some historians have with more sentiment than truth also thus exalted the life of the pioneer woman. An old chronicler of Tennessee, reminiscing on the good old days when his state was still a frontier, wrote that the polished eastern belle dancing to the music of a full band in an ornamented ballroom never enjoyed herself half so much as the settler’s daughter keeping time to a
self-taught fiddle on the bare earthen floor of a log cabin. He elaborated this opinion with aqueous metaphors:

The smile of a polished beauty, is the wave of the lake, where the wave plays gently over it, and her movement, is the gentle stream which drains it; but the laugh of the log cabin, is the gush of nature's fountain, and its movements, its leaping waters.

Thus man sublimates the hardships of youth and bygone days by interpreting them as elements which build character, morals and culture. But the real pioneer, in whatever frontier he lived, had to face hard reality. He had to adjust himself to his environment, had to solve his social and economic problems in his own way in order to survive. He was, therefore, purely a regional character. An authentic re-creation of his daily life is possible only by using the materials of his particular region. General information on pioneering life would result in a composite picture which would be essentially inaccurate. The pioneer of the Appalachian Frontier had entirely different problems from those of the pioneer of another region.

He adhered strictly to a code fashioned largely by his own environment. Living in a primitive stage of society, he gave little consideration to wealth, position and family tradition. His only passport to esteem was his own personal merit. His moral and physical courage, his capacity to amuse and instruct, his innate civility—these were the qualities that decided his standing as a desirable neighbor. Without them he was friendless, unwanted.

To say of a man that he was "not true" was tantamount to branding him an outlaw. Such a man was usually nicknamed "Lawrence" or given some other name which the pioneers regarded as opprobrious. Sometimes if he failed to perform military service he was "hated out" as a coward. If he lacked any of the war implements, such as ammunition, a sharp flint, a scalping knife or a tomahawk, he was regarded with contempt or ridicule, and when the time came for him to take his turn in a scouting party or military campaign he met expressions of indignation in the faces of the neighbors who fastened on him merciless epithets concerning his honor.
A thief was detested like the plague. The man who stole bread while it was baking in the ashes was nicknamed “Bread Rounds,” a cognomen that spread rapidly over the entire community. When the thief would approach a group of his fellow villagers one of them would call, “Who comes there?”

Another would answer, “Bread Rounds.”

The first would then ask, “Who stole the bread out of the ashes?”

The other would give the thief’s name in full.

A third would give confirmation by exclaiming, “That’s true and no lie.”

This form of tongue-lashing would punish the thief for the rest of his days. Sometimes a thief would be sentenced by a jury of citizens to be whipped. After receiving thirteen stripes he was doomed to carry the flag of the United States on his back as a symbol of his punishment. In the case of a larger theft, the offender was usually condemned to Moses’ Law, that is, forty stripes less one. The punishment was followed by a sentence of exile. The culprit was told he must decamp in so many days or suffer the penalty of having the number of stripes doubled.

To say of a man that he had “no neighbors” was, in those times of mutual want and mutual benefactions, enough to make him despicable. His failure to help a neighbor raise a cabin or clear a field or “chop frolic” amounted to worthlessness. The “good neighbor” wanted to contribute his share to the general comfort and public improvement. He felt aggrieved and insulted if an opportunity to do so was not given him. The settler whose neighbors permitted him to remain at home during “cabin raising” was usually anathematized with the expression: “A poor dog is not worth whistling for.”

The ever-present Indian menace made rapid building necessary and group building imperative. On foot and by horseback neighbors would come to the newcomer’s holding and help him raise a cabin. They kept their rifles with their axes, ready to meet any Indian attack on themselves and their families, who usually came along with their pots and kettles.

The average cabin was composed of a single room usually measuring sixteen by twenty feet. Its foundation consisted of
four logs of hickory, oak, young pine, walnut or persimmon, firmly notched and grooved. Upon this base were laid, and notched into one another, logs in the round, usually to the height of seven feet. On these walls were mounted parallel timbers and puncheons to make the roof which was usually composed of logs and wooden slabs. The chinks between the logs were daubed with red clay and moss. When the structure was completed spaces for a door and windows were cut. The door was usually thick and heavy; the windowpanes were made of paper treated either with hog fat or with bear grease.

Every object of the interior furnishings was made by hand on the spot. Some of the chairs were constructed from hickory blocks, others from slabs resting on three logs. The movable table was a slab or two with four legs; the permanent table, built against the wall, was supported at its outer edge by two sticks. Built in the same way was a low bed softened by a mattress of pine needles, chaff or dried moss. In the best light that the greased windowpanes could provide stood the spinning wheel and loom on which the yarn for the family garments was spun and the cloth woven.

Over the fireplace which was made of large flat stones with a mud-plastered chimney hung the firearms, knives and powder horns carved in Indian fashion with scenes depicting war or the hunt. Wooden spoons, plates, bowls and noggins could be seen on a shelf or on pegs. At the hearth in the spring the men would tan and dress the deerskins that were to be sent out with the trade caravan while the womenfolk sewed or made moccasins or mended them in the light coming through the knotholes or provided by candles of bear's grease.

The household utensils, usually known as "cooking irons," consisted of a bulbous pot with a flare at the top to hold the lid; a heavy frying pan with three legs, generally called a "spider"; and another, deeper pan or oven, often with a rounded bottom and a lid with edges curled up to hold the hot coals on top. The gourd, in many sizes and shapes, played an important part in domestic life. It was used as a dipper at the well, at the cider barrel, at the whisky jug, for the "soup, soap, and sap." Another
indispensable household article was the hickory broom. This was made from a sapling several inches in diameter. The lower end was carefully slivered until the heart was reached and removed. The slivers were then fluffed out, sometimes spread over a center-piece, and bound into place and the handle cut to size.

The most prized possession of every frontiersman was his Kentucky rifle. By it he fed, clothed and protected himself and his family while he conquered an empire and built on it a new nation dedicated to his concept of life. Developed from 1728 to about 1760 by skilled German gunsmiths living around Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Kentucky rifle well fitted the needs of the frontier where powder and lead were scarce and loud reports of .50 and .75 caliber muskets were often dangerous.

The rifles that the pioneers used against the Indians or big game were usually of .45 caliber, while "turkey" rifles were about .30. The Kentucky rifle weighed from eight to twelve pounds, and the bullets used in them ran from approximately thirty-seven to a pound for a .50 caliber gun to one hundred seventy-five for a .30 caliber. For accurate shooting the rifle ball was loaded with a greased patch of cloth. The flintlock and the single trigger were the fashion. Many of the gun barrels were made by blacksmiths who hammered out the barrel from bar iron, bored and rifled it, tempered it, made the flintlocks and double triggers, set a segment of a slick quarter for front sight and rounded out the set and the hindsight, made the bullet molds, stocked the gun with curly maple or black walnut, and tested it on their own ground.

The Appalachian pioneers fashioned most of their clothing from products of their own environment. The spinning wheel spun the cloth for nearly all the family apparel, including dresses, socks, shirts, trousers and underwear. William Poague introduced the spinning wheel in Kentucky in 1776; it spun coarse yarns from buffalo wool. Soon thereafter settlers improvised a few rude looms which wove "a rough cloth suitable for men's winter wear."

Before the introduction of the spinning wheel the migrating farmers had brought their clothing with them. Many women
spent the last few months in their old homes making enough garments to last them and members of their families for several seasons. Just before the McAfee families moved to Kentucky in 1776 their wives and daughters busied themselves day and night weaving blankets, bed clothing and articles of linen and flannel.

Now the presence of the spinning wheel made such toil unnecessary. In winter the women wore linsey; in summer they preferred linen. Instead of wearing hats or bonnets, they tied handkerchiefs around their heads. As yet their wardrobes lacked such luxuries as broadcloth, gingham and calico. In place of overcoats and cloaks they threw blankets over their shoulders. The women, anxious to supplement the cotton and woolen goods brought from the east, made yarns and cloth from what material they could come by. Before the production of flax and wool they made cloth from fiber obtained from nettles which were gathered in late winter or early spring when the wet weather had rotted the stalks. The fibers made a very strong thread which, combined with buffalo-wool yarn, formed the warp in a very serviceable cloth.

The Indian influence was evident in the pioneer's hunting apparel. Only the 'coonskin cap with tail was his own design. The moccasins, cut from a single piece of deer or buffalo skin; the leggings, laced well up the thigh; and the long, fringed hunting shirt of leather—all these were borrowed from the Indians. About the loins the pioneer wore, in Indian fashion, a textile breechcloth and sometimes an undershirt of soft deerskin. Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century did he discard leather for textile clothing.

The early Tennessee settlers were acquainted with knee breeches and cocked hat, but only the leaders cared to wear them. When Casper Mansker was elected lieutenant colonel of militia in the Cumberland settlements he wore "a neat fitting suit of regimentals." John Sevier wore "civilized clothing" at home and Indian dress when he was fighting the Cherokee. The newcomer to the back country discarded his ruffles, broadcloth and queue rather than risk the ridicule of his neighbors.

Joseph Doddridge, one of the best authorities on pioneer life
in western Virginia, described the costume of the region in characteristically vivid detail. It was a kind

... of a loose frock, reaching half way down the thighs, with large sleeves, open before, and so wide as to lap over a foot or more when belted. The cape was large, and sometimes handsomely fringed with a ravelled piece of cloth of a different color from that of the hunting shirt itself. The bosom of this dress served as a wallet to hold a chunk of bread, cakes, jirk, tow for wiping the barrel of the rifle, or any other necessity for the hunter or warrior. The belt, which was always tied behind, answered several purposes, besides that of holding the dress together. In cold weather the mittens and sometimes the bullet bag occupied the front part of it. To the right was suspended the tomahawk and to the left the scalping knife in its leathern sheath. The hunting shirt was generally made of linsey, sometimes of coarse linen, and a few dressed with deerskins....

A pair of drawers or breeches and leggins were the dress of the thighs and legs. A pair of moccasins answered for the feet much better than shoes. These were made of dressed deer skin. They were mostly made of a single piece with a gathering seam along the top of the foot, and another from the bottom of the heel, without gathers as high as the ankle joint or a little higher. Flaps were left on each side to reach some distance up the leg. These were nicely adapted to the ankles, and lower part of the leg, by thongs of deerskin, so that no dust, gravel, or snow would get within the moccasin....

In wet weather it was usually said that wearing them was "a decent way of going barefooted."

Most of the food came from the forest. Elk and buffalo disappeared early from the Appalachian Frontier, but deer and bear meat supplanted beef and pork until the beginning of the nineteenth century. J. F. D. Smythe, who toured the region late in the eighteenth century, wrote that game was so plentiful that a man could easily kill six or eight deer every day, "which many do merely for their skins, to the great injury and destruction of their species, and to the prejudice and public loss of the community at large." Wild turkeys, he said, were very large and fat
and could be seen in flocks of as many as 5,000. In the fall and early winter the settlers hunted bear and other fur-skinned animals. An early hunter, Daniel Trabue, thought that the most beautiful thing he ever saw was "a parcell of dogs in full chase after a bear and they a yelping every jump, they would soon stop him and the hunters would shoot him."

One of the earliest chroniclers and surveyors of the frontier, Colonel William Byrd, who always wrote with vigor and often with great charm, learned from one of his Indian guides that bear meat contained properties helpful to procreation. On being asked to explain why few or none of his countrywomen were barren, the Indian replied

... with a Broad grin upon his Face, they had an infallible secret for that. Upon my being importunate to know what the secret might be, he informed me that, if any Indian woman did not prove with child at a decent time after Marriage, the Husband, to save his Reputation with the women, forthwith entered into a Bear-dyet for Six Weeks, which in that time makes him so vigorous that he grows exceedingly impertinent to his poor wife and 'tis great odds but he makes her a Mother in Nine Months.

Time proved to Byrd that his Indian spoke truth. All the "Marryed men of our Company were joyful Fathers within forty weeks after they got Home, and most of the Single men had children sworn to them within the same time." An exception was the chaplain, "who, with much ado, made a shift to cast out that importunate kind of Devil, by Dint of Fasting and Prayer."

The settlers also ate the meat of the domestic animals they had brought with them. Their cows and hogs, turned loose in the woods, fed on white clover and luxuriant grasses. The presence of wolves made sheep raising difficult. Throughout the winter the cattle throve on cane that grew wild everywhere, and the hogs ate nuts and mast. From roaming in the woods these animals became wild, forcing their owners either to put bells on them or to distinguish them as their own by branding them or by cropping their ears in various ways. The settlers took good care of their livestock—particularly of their milch cows—which the In-
di ans made every effort to drive off, more to deprive their owners of food than to obtain it for themselves.

The woods abounded with hickory nuts, walnuts, wild grapes and pawpaws which helped to balance the pioneer diet. The basic crop was corn: it needed the least care and trouble; it stood all winter long upon the stalk without injury from weather or danger of damage by disease. Therefore, in the spring of 1776 the Kentucky settlers planted corn and reaped a good harvest. When the corn matured it was either roasted in hot ashes or made into hominy or ground into meal. In addition to corn the settlers grew potatoes, turnips, pumpkins, watermelons, muskmelons, peppers, cucumbers and other vegetables. Maple sugar furnished them virtually their only dietary luxury; it was sometimes used to sweeten parched corn which had been ground into meal. The first wheat in Transylvania was planted at Harrodsburg in 1776 by Thomas Denton.

The most precious of the primary foods was salt. No pirate ever guarded his treasure chest as carefully as the pioneer guarded his salt gourd. Brought on pack horses from Augusta and Richmond, salt commanded as much as ten dollars a bushel. Small amounts, however, could be secured from salt springs. Five to eight hundred gallons of water boiled in large iron kettles usually left a residue of one bushel of salt, which weighed about eighty-four pounds and equaled the value of a good cow and calf.

In the latter part of 1777, as the result of Indian incursions, Kentuckians found themselves in such desperate need for salt that they were constrained to petition the Virginia assembly for relief. Complaining that many of the salt springs were on properties of persons "who had never been at any Pains or Expense to erect Manufactories at them," they urged the assembly to appropriate them, convert them into public property and undertake the manufacture of salt. This, they explained, would bring relief to the settlers of Kentucky and at the same time provide the mother state with a profitable industry. The assembly ignored the petition.

The typical settler was a small farmer who lived with his wife and a swarm of children on a big tract of wooded land. He
rarely cleared more than forty of his large number of acres. Though he seldom possessed a dollar in specie, he was never in want. The extraordinary fertility of the soil in Kentucky and Tennessee early brought him wealth, though he started with a small capital. Save for corn and wild clover, his livestock needed no provender during the greater part of the year. After the second year he could well afford to feed them, for the cleared and quickly cultivated land yielded fifty to sixty bushels of corn in the first year and seventy to one hundred and fifty in the second year.

With a little attention, his garden produced all the vegetables he needed. His domestic animals increased; he had plenty of meat. By the third and fourth years he could build a better home which would cost him little more than the labor of his family and his servants. He could furnish his new home by bartering or selling a part of his farm produce. After the second year of improvement the value of his estate increased nearly thirty per cent. If he desired to move westward to cheaper lands, he could easily sell his farm at a handsome profit to an immigrant who sought a ready supply of animals and corn for his family.

The pioneer usually cleared his land by burning. In early spring he would set fire to the dead grass on the meadows to reveal the young green grass to the cattle and other stock. He would belt or gird trees by chopping a ring around each of them with an ax. After they died he could fell them, cut them into logs, roll them into piles and burn them. He also burned the stumps to the ground and sometimes dug them out. Sometimes the fire would get beyond control and would destroy a large area of forest lands which thereafter became known as barrens.

The farmer chopped the cane with his ax and dug out the roots with his mattock. He cultivated his farm with the plow, the hoe and the harrow. With his crude moldboard plow he broke up the ground which needed no deep digging into the rich, new soil. He gave all his attention to breaking up the difficult virgin soil with his plow while a small boy usually rode the horse to guide it. This was no easy task, for the horse was frequently lean and lazy and the hours long and hot under the summer sun. The plow would repeatedly snag under a root, giving the rider a sav-
age jolt in the stomach. The farmer broke the clods of earth by dragging over them a narrow wooden harrow or a brushy limb of a tree. He planted all his grain by hand.

Teutonic racial pride prevented all but a few of the unmarried pioneers from taking squaws as their wives though they seldom overlooked an opportunity to take them for their pleasure. One of the very few prominent Virginians free of this prejudice was Colonel William Byrd who, writing in 1728, openly advocated union of the two races as the only means of removing the hostile feelings between them. Squaws, he asserted, possessed all the qualities of white women.

The Indian Woman would have made altogether as Honest Wives for the first Planters, as the Damsels they us’d to purchase from aboard the Ships. It is Strange, therefore, that any good Christian Shou’d have refused a wholesome Straight Bed-fellow, when he might have had so fair a Portion with her, as the Merit of saving her Soul.

The English could never hope to win the esteem of the Indians so long as they disdained to intermarry with them. Wrote Byrd:

Had such Affinities been contracted in the Beginning, how much Bloodshed had been prevented, and how populous would the Country have been, and, consequently, how considerable? Nor wou’d the Shade of the Skin have been any reproach at this day; for if a Moor may be washt white in 3 Generations, Surely an Indian might have been blancht in two.

Free of prejudice, the French saw the Indians as they were—attractive, tall and well proportioned.

Their late Grand Monarch thought it not below even the Dignity of a Frenchman to become one flesh with this People, and therefore Ordered 100 Livres for any of his Subjects, Man or Woman, that wou’d intermarry with a Native.

By this wise policy, the French strengthened their interests among the Indians while their religion propagated just as far as
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their love. "I heartily wish," concluded Byrd, "this well-concerted Scheme don't thereafter give the French an Advantage over his Majesty's good Subjects on the Northern Continent of America."

Unlike the squaw, the pioneer woman led a life of hardship. She did as much work as her husband. She cooked, churned, fed and milked the cows, hoed corn, dried beans, chopped wood, carried water, spun clothing and made floating wick lamps from clay and bear grease. Her unremitting toil, her affection for her family and her sterling good sense won her the admiration of several pioneer writers, one of whom idealized her as womanhood "in her true glory." According to this writer, the frontier woman was not, as were women elsewhere, "a doll to carry silks and jewels," a "puppet to be dandled by fops," an "idol of profane adoration, remembered today and discarded tomorrow." On the contrary, she ruled by affection, not passion. She imparted to her man her constancy, not her weakness. She was not, like her more polished sister in the East, "the source and mirror of vanity." Assuming the cares of the wife, she guided the labors of her husband and spread cheerfulness by her domestic diligence. As a wife she placed all her joy in the merited approbation of her husband. As a mother she was affectionate, ardent in instructing her children and careful in training them to think, meditate and pray. This encomiast seasoned his sentimentality with not a few grains of truth.

The unmarried girl found plenty of time for the pleasures of courtship. She started "sparking" in her early teens. If she was still unmarried at twenty she was regarded as unfortunate, out of circulation, a thing of scorn. Weddings were very festive affairs. Since the entire neighborhood was present at them, they were usually held in the bride's front yard where a gay fire and buckets of whisky put everyone in a romantic mood. The most popular song of the time was "Old Sister Pheby," which was sung all night long around the fire.

The first marriage in Kentucky took place at Boonesboro in the summer of 1776 when Elizabeth Callaway became the bride of Samuel Henderson. Even for that time and place the bride and groom wore clothes unsuited for the occasion. Elizabeth wore
a plain Irish linen dress and Samuel was attired in a hunting shirt borrowed from a friend. The only delicacy of the bridal feast was watermelon. In view of the instability of the government founded by the Transylvania proprietors, the bride’s father, in consenting to the match, “required a bond of Henderson that the marriage should be again Solemnized, by authority less doubtfull, at the earliest opportunity.” The pledge was sacredly fulfilled.

If you became ill, your life depended on whether your constitution could overcome not only the disease but also the concoction prescribed to cure it. Doctors were few and far between. “No one who bore the name of doctor,” says Doddridge, lived “within a considerable distance of the residence of my father.” In these circumstances death was an easy ravager before the puny force of home remedies. The only disease partly understood seems to have been pleurisy. If you had a fever, you were given warm drinks to induce sweating. Of course you were denied cold water and fresh air.

If your child had worms, you usually expelled them by the application of salt. Or perhaps by the scrapings of pewter spoons, usually from twenty to forty grains, commonly given with sugar. If that proved useless, you applied large doses of green copperas or sulphate of iron. A burn was cooled with poultices of Indian meal or of roasted turnips.

The croup, which the pioneers called the “bold hives,” was the most common disease of children. Its cure consisted of the juice of roasted onions or garlic or, better still, of “wall-ink.” If the stricken child had a fever, he was sweated with a dose of Virginia snake root oil. To this was usually added the physic of half a pint of white walnut bark which had been peeled downward. If the child needed to vomit, it received the same amount of white walnut bark which had been peeled upward.

The bite of a copperhead or of a rattlesnake sent an imposing array of specifics to the rescue. Doddridge gives a vivid account of how a bitten man was treated:

I remember when a small boy to have seen a man bitten by a rattlesnake brought into the fort on a man’s back. One of the
company dragged the snake after him by a forked stick fastened in its head. The body of the snake was cut into pieces of about two inches in length, split open in succession, and laid on the wound to draw out the poison, as they expressed it. When this was over, a fire was kindled up in the fort yard and the whole of the serpent burned to ashes, by way of revenge for the injury he had done. After this process was over, a large quantity of chestnut leaves was collected and boiled in a pot. The whole of the wounded man's leg and part of his thigh were placed in a piece of chestnut bark, fresh from the tree, and the decoction poured on the leg so as to run down into the pot again; after continuing this process for some time, a quantity of the boiled leaves were bound to the leg. This was repeated several times a day. The man got well; but whether owing to the treatment bestowed on his wound is not so certain.

Sometimes, in the absence of a specific remedy, the pioneers substituted cupping, sucking the wound and filling deep incisions with salt and gunpowder.

A common disease of the time was the itch, which was generally treated with an ointment made of brimstone and lard. Slippery elm bark and flax seed and other such poultices soothed gunshot wounds. Hunters gnawed with that plague of their occupation, rheumatism, got relief by sleeping with their feet in the fire and by applying rattlesnake oil or the grease of wolves, bears, raccoons, ground hogs and polecats on the swelled joints.

Those wracked with coughs or prostrate with pneumonia drank great quantities of a syrup consisting principally of spike-nard and elecampane. If honored remedies failed to cure a person of a disease, his or her kinfolk had recourse to choruses and incantations. In his youth Doddridge learned the incantation in German for curing burns, for stopping toothache and for charming away bullets in battle, but he had no faith in its efficacy. Some pioneers believed that only the blood of a black cat could cure erysipelas, which was commonly called St. Anthony's Fire. The result of this superstition was that a black cat with whole ears and tail was as rare on the frontier as money.

Many pioneers laid certain diseases to witchcraft. These were cured by drawing a portrait of the witch on a stump or piece of
board and then shooting at it with a bullet that contained a small quantity of silver. The bullet quickly transferred a painful and sometimes a mortal spell on that part of the witch which corresponded with the part of the portrait struck by the bullet. Another method of cure was that of hanging up in a chimney a corked vial containing a child's urine. This cast on the witch a spell which lasted as long as the vial remained in the chimney. She could break the spell only by borrowing some article from the family of the person she had bewitched.

Bewitched cattle and dogs were burned on the forehead with a branding iron. If they were dead, they were burned to ashes. This inflicted on the witch a spell from which she could disengage herself only by borrowing something from the owner of the dead animal or animals. Many settlers blamed witches for draining those of their cows that failed to furnish an adequate or expected quantity of milk. For each cow they intended to milk the witches were said to hang over the door of the barn a new towel on which they had fixed a new pin. They extracted the milk from the fringes of the towel, in the manner of milking a cow, while they uttered certain incantations.

The early German glass blowers in Kentucky believed that witches blew out the fires in their furnaces. They sought to forestall a recurrence of this evil by throwing live puppies into the burning coals.

Surrounded by constant danger and separated from one another by walls of trees and sometimes of mountains, the pioneers of the Appalachian Frontier felt great need for the comforts of religion. And the religions that the majority preferred were those that filled their lonely and hungry souls with all the fervor and zeal they could command and alleviated their feelings of guilt by paroxysms of repentance.

Many Presbyterian settlers found their faith too stiff and formal to satisfy their spiritual needs. Its ministers smacked too strongly of the seminary and stayed too close to their churches. The settlers wanted a religion in which they could personally participate, one which radiated human sympathy and which summoned them like a trumpet call to repentance. Such were
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the Methodist and Baptist faiths. With their democratic govern-
ments and evangelistic zeal these religions satisfied so well the
needs of the frontiersmen that membership in each of them out-
numbered that of any other religion in the Old Southwest.

But the earliest known faith practiced there was Presbyterian-
ism. Its first ministers followed closely behind the first settlers
and shared the rigors of frontier life with them. In fighting the
Indians they

... felt they were dispossessing the Canaanites, and were thus
working the Lord's will in preparing the land for a race which
they believed was more truly His chosen people than was that
nation which Joshua led across the Jordan. They exhorted no less
earnestly in the bare meeting-places on Sunday, because their
hands were roughened with guiding the plow and wielding the
axe on week-days; for they did not believe that being called to
preach the word of God absolved them from earning their living
by the sweat of their brows.

Of this ilk was Charles Cummings, the earliest minister in east-
ern Tennessee, a firebrand born in Ulster and educated in Penn-
sylvania. Every Sabbath for thirty years he would “put on his
shot pouch, shoulder his rifle, mount his dun stallion, and ride off
to church,” where he preached, often for two hours, with his
eyes constantly shifting from Bible to gun.

No less militant was Samuel Doak, whose Mosaic figure and
stentorian voice kept his congregation in rapt attention even
when once he preached for two hours in a graveyard in pouring
rain. This stern, hard Man of God had walked through Mary-
land and Virginia driving a flea-bitten gray nag loaded with a
sackful of books, had crossed the mountains and had followed
narrow trails down to the Holston settlements where he estab-
lished Salem Church near Jonesboro. He purchased a farm and
built on it a log school which in 1785 was incorporated as Martin
Academy. Ten years later it became Washington College with
Doak as president.

At first the highly educated Presbyterian ministers easily dom-
inated the religious life of the German and the Scotch-Irish
immigrants. But in the next generation when the population of
the Old Southwest was composed largely of those born and raised on the frontier, the influence of the Presbyterian faith waned while that of the Baptist and the Methodist rose and spread. The uneducated ministers of these religions, belonging economically to the same class as the majority of the settlers and being democratic in their political ideas and in their church government, fitted well into the social pattern of the frontier. The nature of their religious programs, too, appealed strongly to the settlers, many of whom were drinkers, gamblers, blasphemers and libertines whose feelings of guilt moved them to seek repentance through a passionate gospel of hell-fire and salvation.

In the Tidewater the Baptists and Methodists had been subjected to the contempt and persecution which the followers of accepted faiths have always reserved for those of newer ones. Episcopalians and Presbyterians regarded the Baptists as an outlandish group and spread the impious word that most of them were deformed in one way or another. One credulous old Episcopalian lady inquired of a Baptist minister why most people of his faith were hard-lipped, bleary-eyed, bowlegged, hump-backed and clubfooted.

The motto of the Baptist faith was said to be: "Water! Water! Water!" They were accused of "strong plunging" and of "letting their poor children run wild." Even the Methodist minister, Peter Cartwright, saw the Baptists with prejudiced eyes. They "made so much ado about baptism by immersion," he wrote, "that the uninformed would suppose that heaven was an island, and there was no way to get there but by diving and swimming." Thirty or more of the Baptist preachers "were honored with a dungeon"; some of them "were imprisoned as often as four times"; in a single year, five were arrested in Spottsylvania County as disturbers of the peace. One of the charges made against them was that "they cannot meet a man upon the road, but that they must ram a text of scripture down his throat."

Abused and persecuted for their religious ideas and forced to pay taxes for the support of worldly ministers of other faiths, "whose only recommendation was that they had received a university education," the Baptists of Virginia agitated for religious liberty and for separation of church and state. Backed by such
champions of western ideals as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry and George Mason, the Baptists in 1785 saw their wishes realized. Thus they were the chief promoters of a principle which has been called "the greatest distinctive contribution by America to the sum of Western Christian civilization."

Rejoicing in their triumph, the Baptists resolved to carry their evangelistic faith across the mountains where among the cane-brakes and forests of Kentucky and Tennessee they sought an "ampler ether, a diviner air" in which to worship God as they pleased and to increase the fold. They soon won the sympathy of the pioneers by their democratic ideals, their piety and goodness and the patience with which they had suffered persecution. Their ministers, too, came from among their flocks and lived and worked as they did. They dwelled in small cabins with dirt floors, slept on skin-covered pole bunks, cleared the ground, planted corn and vegetables, split rails and raised hogs and cattle.

Because they had been taxed in the Tidewater to support Episcopalian and Presbyterian ministers, some of whom were unworthy of their calling, the Baptist preachers and their people regarded all highly educated ministers with suspicion. They thought ministers should come from the people and should support themselves by pursuing secular occupations. A typical Baptist minister, John Taylor, lived in a cabin sixteen feet square which had no floor, table, bedstead or stool. Depending largely on meat, Taylor often went out with hunters, but, being a poor shot, he seldom bagged anything. The hunters always shared their meat with him. He did a prodigious amount of work. Altogether he cleared nearly four hundred acres in the heaviest forest of Kentucky and made numerous improvements on the land. In one day's work he put up 100 panels of fence six rails high. And he had had to carry the rails which were eleven feet long for a considerable distance. While Taylor thus supported himself and his family in the winter of 1784-1785 he conducted the first Baptist revival in Kentucky.

Under Taylor's ministry, and that of another of his caliber, Lewis Craig, Baptist churches sprang up in considerable numbers along the banks of creeks and rivers where scores of repentant pioneers each year sought salvation in baptism.
The organization and doctrine of the Methodist church were even more congenial to the religious needs of the settlers than those of the Baptist. The democratic nature of the Methodist church government, its fiery evangelism and the emphasis it placed on individual responsibility made it particularly agreeable to the pioneers who, engaged in conquering a continent, prized "individual independence above all earthly possessions." Living remote from human contacts, they also found great comfort in the Methodist doctrine that stressed the close relationship between God and man.

The bearer of this comforting doctrine was the circuit preacher. He lived on his horse; his house was his saddlebags. Wherever he found himself—in a crude cabin, on his horse or under the branches of a cooling beech or maple—he was equally at home. He was so ardent in pursuing his work that he awaited neither manner nor means. He never followed wagon trails; he preceded them. Like the Baptists, he came from the same class as his flock; he had a perfect understanding of the habits, feelings and prejudices of the pioneers.

He harmonized perfectly with the fluid nature of the frontier, sometimes covering a territory of four or five hundred miles. He was the working embodiment of the Biblical passage, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." With a salary of only a few dollars a year he placed complete reliance in the Lord. He conquered hardship and danger with zeal and courage. Sometimes he rode twenty or thirty miles without seeing a soul; but his host always received him with joy, fed him and let him rest on a rug before the fireplace. If the rug was full of fleas that disturbed his slumber, he cheerfully found refuge on a clean plank or couched himself in a hollow log.

At dawn, rain or shine, he resumed his circuit. His defiance of wind and rain inspired the proverb that pioneers were wont to utter on an inclement day: "There is nothing out today but crows and Methodist preachers."

The typical Methodist circuit rider was so familiar and lovable a figure on the frontier that even small children and their pets welcomed him. His costume was that of the ordinary minister
of his day: short breeches, long stockings and a dingy black double-breasted coat that fell almost to his buckled shoes. He was no Chesterfield in his manners. His hair, parted in the middle and falling to his shoulders, gave him a saintly air, and heightened the paleness of his face, which resulted from insufficient food and frequent exposure.

At the beginning of the service the circuit rider sang a hymn with his congregation. Then he prayed with such sweet pathos that heaven and earth for the time being seemed to join. Then he read a favorite text, such as "the upright shall love thee," upon which he preached a sermon so charged with emotion that, because of its wildness and incoherence, it quailed some of the most hardened listeners. Man, he said, was conceived in sin; but Jesus Christ died to save him—died to save all. Man is endowed with free will, he has the power to choose between good and evil; therefore, he must give an account of himself to God. Man can be newly created, can be regenerated, not by a change of purpose but by a change of character. Thus he is converted, is endowed with a "new spirit" that is necessary for admission into the kingdom of heaven. What constitutes conversion? Faithfulness to godly living. But the "backslider"—the Methodist who, having once been converted, fails in faithfulness—is doomed to eternal damnation. Such preachments harmonized with the essential practicality of frontier life.

Yet the combined efforts of the Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist churches failed to lessen frontier immorality. After the American Revolution countless waves of migration poured into Kentucky and Tennessee from all directions. Some of the settlers gave way to the loose living that inevitably follows war. More were sympathizers of the French Revolution who entertained ideas incompatible with the teachings of conventional faiths. Many were veterans who, enjoying the security of the victorious, gave little or no thought to "the spirit of the gospel." All had left the relatively comfortable life of the East for the barren existence of the frontier.

These factors, and the endless search of the settlers for choice land, their untold hardships and the dangers they daily encoun-
tered, engendered a materialistic outlook, a greed that sustained them in their bleak environment. But as they grew in wealth they coarsened and petrified in spirit. While they welcomed Sunday as a day free from labor, they spent most of it in rowdy entertainment. They quarreled, fought, whored, blasphemed and got drunk. A minister who made a trip to Kentucky at this time was so distressed by the "pride and profaneness" of the settlers that he feared a "great decay of true and vital religion."

During a visit to eastern Tennessee Bishop Francis Asbury of the Methodist Church sensed a deplorable lack of religious sentiment in the people. "When I reflect that not one in a hundred came here to get religion; but rather to get plenty of good land," he wrote, "I think it will be well if some or many do not eventually lose their souls."

But the hour of their deliverance from evil was at hand. The spiritual barbarism of many frontiersmen so horrified the Presbyterian minister James McGready that he resolved to bring them back to Christian living by introducing the revivalistic methods which he recently had seen working with such excellent results at Hampden-Sidney College. McGready's teachings deviated considerably from the accepted dogmas of his religion. He was interested not in predestination, but in bringing sinners to walk in the path of God. His sermons, full of fire and brimstone, had a tremendous appeal. His description of hell was so vivid that his congregation trembled and sweated. They saw the lake of fire yawning before them and God's angry hand thrusting them down into its scorching and bottomless incandescence.

McGready talked endlessly of rebirth, repentance, redemption. He demanded that his congregation pray every Saturday night and Sunday morning and all day on the third Saturday of each month for rebirth, repentance, redemption. These practices attracted such large crowds for several days that McGready was obliged to provide them with some accommodation. They accepted his invitation to camp at the meeting ground, thereby initiating the camp meeting which Baptist and especially Methodist ministers promptly adopted in a mighty effort to turn the pioneers away from their sinful pleasures and worldly pursuits.

The pioneers responded with overwhelming enthusiasm. Many
of them suffered from feelings of guilt resulting from a conflict between their stern Christian upbringing and their general worldliness. In the soul-shaking preaching, praying and singing of the camp meetings they found expiation for their sins. The camp meetings also served many as the only social events in their otherwise bleak existence. No man ever longed for the company of his fellow man as ardently as did the American pioneer. Small wonder that, seldom seeing a new face all winter long and sensing his spiritual emptiness, he looked forward to camp meetings as the chief social events of his life.

When in late August or early September the camp meeting season opened, hundreds—sometimes thousands—of settlers with their families thronged on foot, by horseback and in their crude wagons toward the place designated for the “holy fair.” For several weeks the settlements were deserted and the fields were left unworked. Some of the settlers had to travel as much as thirty or forty miles, but they considered this a small price to pay for the social uplift that awaited them.

After traveling a few miles one group usually met another; they would join and share experiences the rest of the journey. When they reached the camping ground they called joyfully to acquaintances from a distance and warmly greeted friends they had not seen for months. The early arrivals made bonfires from pine knots to guide those who might come after dark. By evening the camp was in order, the wagons were drawn up in a wide circle, and around each group women busily arranged the provisions and sleeping quarters as they gossiped to one another.

The best picture of a camp meeting is perhaps a composite one drawn from the salient features of several meetings. The minister mounted a stump or wagon and called his audience to attention. With a hard, piercing look he hurled this accusation: “You are a moving mass of putrefaction!” Then in a more subdued voice he “related his trials, experiences, travels, persecutions, sorrows and joys,” while the audience now and then gave approval.

“Amen!”
“Tell it, brother!”
“Yes, I know it!”
“Praise God!”
“Come to the Lord!”

Suddenly a woman’s laugh—wild, piercing, Mephistophelean—inspired the minister to greater eloquence. His voice, as loud as a priest of Baal, rose to an uproar, then softened to a hissing whisper, then crescendoed again to a mighty fortissimo. The crowd swayed as if participating in a modern swingfest; some rose to their feet and began a wildly rhythmic dance. And the minister, having “got up the ’rousements” and brought “the battle to the gate,” continued to pour out his harangue of hell and damnation. The audience groaned and wept, as much from terror inspired by his voice and wild gesticulations as from its own conviction of guilt.

Suddenly the preacher stopped talking and began to sing a hymn. A small group joined him. Another group started a hymn of its own. Still another group followed, until six different hymns echoed through the countryside while here and there persons sobbed and groaned and convulsed in the name of the Lord.

At this point several preachers made their appearance in different parts of the field. Mounting a stump or jumping into a wagon bed, each gathered around him a crowd whose size depended on the intensity of his eloquence. In the midst of a sermon a man or woman gave a joyful shout. Conversion had come, and the repentant sinner, lifted onto the shoulders of a neighbor, was carried through the crowd, which sent up a paean of praise to the goodness of the Lord.

Children were suddenly endowed with the tongues of veteran evangelists. With tears streaming down his cheeks a boy of twelve preached until he was exhausted. Mustering his last bit of strength, he let fall a soggy handkerchief as he cried, “Thus, O Sinner, shall you drop into hell, unless you forsake your sins and turn to the Lord.”

Two girls, aged nine and ten, sobbed for mercy. Relieved of her anguish, one of them turned to the other and cried, “O, you little sinner, come to Christ!” She came.

A boy of seven spoke in a “rapturous language” and then fell into a trance. Hours later he awoke into religious ecstasy.
The omnipresent frenzy induced bodily changes in many. One man's arms and legs stiffened as if with arthritis, his heart beat furiously, and he fell with a sharp scream to the ground. He lay for several hours as if dead and then rose shouting: "I am saved! I am saved!" By this hysterical seizure, known as the "falling exercise," he won the kingdom of heaven.

Thenceforth men and women fell all over the field like corn in a windstorm. Three thousand fell at Cabin Creek. Many who came to witness the phenomenon were similarly affected. Realizing their weakness or susceptibility, some tried to run away into the woods, but there they succumbed. In a few days the prostrate bodies were so numerous that they were laid in rows to prevent the gyrating and contorting multitude from trampling them. Moreover, clean straw was spread in different parts of the fields to soften the blow for those who were expected to fall. Bad and good people fell with equal rapidity.

The leader of a group of rowdies bent on breaking up a praying circle mounted his horse and rode furiously toward the crowd. Before he reached it, however, he suddenly wheeled his horse with the intention of scattering the group more effectively. Instantly he fell from his horse as if struck by lightning and lay on the ground rigid and unconscious.

A woman of easy virtue lay senseless for seventy-two hours. Many thought her dead when suddenly she disengaged herself from her trance with the ease of a child waking from sleep, sprang to her feet, and began shouting and singing.

Young men and women became victims of spasmodic convulsions known as the "jerks," which usually started in the forearm and gradually affected every muscle of the body. They were unable to walk but jerked backward and forward in rapid succession and almost touched the ground with their heads. Those with pronounced guilt feelings jerked with such violence that they feared they would tear themselves to pieces. The hair of female jerkers, becoming disheveled, lashed and cracked like whips and could be heard twenty feet away. Sometimes jerkers, holding on to trees, kicked up the earth, like horses stamping flies. The minister doubtless helped to induce the convulsions.
A thoroughgoing exhibitionist, he jerked, danced, chanted and gesticulated madly.

His antics brought many conversions, but few were permanent. Indeed, religious ecstasy often degenerated into adultery. Some persons jerked and fell one night only to indulge in baser passions on the next. Watchmen, appointed by the ministers, made the rounds with torches made of pine knots in search of fornicators. One found six men sleeping with a young woman. Another discovered, doubtless with some pique, a couple fornicating in a cornfield. The months following a camp meeting always brought good harvest of illegitimate children.

One Becca Bell, who had fallen or jerked at several different times, became "as big as all get-out" to "a wicked trifling schoolmaster who says he'll be damned to hell if he ever marries her." Shocked ministers of several faiths recorded in their diaries the names of girls who, at the camp meeting, embraced Christ only to adore Beelzebub.

Small wonder that a number of the more level-headed ministers deplored the emotional excesses of the camp meeting. At first even Francis Asbury doubted its value. Another minister, a Presbyterian, condemned it on the ground that God is a God of order and not of confusion and that "whatever tends to destroy the comely order of his worship is not from him, for he is consistent with himself." Still another, John Lyle, wrote with perhaps more psychological insight than he knew that the paroxysms of the camp meeting were "not the effects of a Divine impulse" but rather "the evidence of human infirmity."

Nevertheless, the camp meetings were responsible for increasing the membership of the Methodist Church threefold within ten years. And Francis Asbury no longer doubted. As he made plans to carry the evangelical work north of the Ohio, he wrote: "Bohemia has a great work—camp meetings have done this, glory to the Great I Am!"

The favorite sports were designed to meet the dangers of frontier life. Nearly every well-grown boy entering his teens was given a rifle which he learned to shoot accurately by using
a log or a forked stick as a rest and by placing a moss pad under the barrel to keep it from swerving and spoiling his aim. After practicing on raccoons, squirrels and turkeys he usually proved an expert marksman in shooting Indians.

Constantly jumping over brambles or fallen timber, the boy developed agility in escaping from Indians and in extricating himself from their ruses. In autumn he could walk over the fallen leaves without crushing one or breaking a twig. He developed a remarkable sensitivity to sound. He could tell by the report of a rifle whether it belonged to an Indian or to a white man. He wrestled with his neighbor, knew how to throw him and preferred the scalp hold to the toe hold. He showed consummate skill in throwing the tomahawk. He learned that a tomahawk with a handle of a given length made so many revolutions in a given distance. At five steps it struck with the handle downward; at seven and a half, with the handle upward. The experienced boy could measure distance with his eyes as he walked through the forest and could bury a tomahawk in a tree in any way he wished.

The adroit imitation of the songs of birds and the calling of beasts was a necessary part of the frontier boy’s education. The marvelous tales of Cooper pale into insignificance when compared to the wonderful feats and adventures of Edmund Jennings, son of Jonathan Jennings, whom we shall presently see with John Donelson in his amazing voyage up the Tennessee. Young Jennings could imitate the hoot of an owl, the scream of a panther, the bleat of a fawn and the gobble of a turkey so accurately that “the owl would perch above his head, the panther creep from his lair, the fawn run to meet its dam, and the turkey to join its mates.”

The forest speech was not only the language of sport; it was also the “settler’s secret code of war.” Stray Indians put themselves in touch again with the band by turkey calls in the daytime and by owl or wolf calls at night. The pioneer used the same means to trick the Indians into betraying their whereabouts or to “lure strays, unwittingly, within reach of the knife.” A young pioneer named Benjamin Castleman was so sensitive to sound that he could detect the slightest inaccuracy in the imita-
tion of an animal. Once, in roaming through the forest, he heard the imitation of an owl. Though it was almost perfect, he grew suspicious. The woo-woo call and the woo-woo answer were not well timed and toned; the chatter was a failure; and, moreover, it emanated, not from a tree, but from the ground. “I'll see you,” he said to himself, and as he approached he saw something of about the height of a stump standing between the forks of a chestnut tree which divided near the ground. Well, he knew that no stump could be there; he put “Betsy” to his face, and instantly the stump was a live Indian that thumped to the ground near the roots of the forked chestnut.

One of the favorite school games of the frontier shows that children were typically American in their hatred of oppression and their desperate willingness to fight for freedom. The game was that of barring out the master before the Christmas holidays. The master, anticipating the annual revolution a few weeks before it took place, would become as oppressive and stern as a czar. Whereupon his subjects, growing less patient of restraint, would call a convention where one “born to command” would propose a rebellion aimed at overthrowing the “despot.”

The plan, meeting the general approval of the student body and supported by “some congenial spirits of the neighborhood,” would be put into operation on the Friday morning preceding Christmas when at an early hour, the children would take possession of the school, make a large fire in the fireplace, barricade the doors and greet the master with shouts of defiance. They refuse him admittance; he commands submission; they decline to surrender, except on honorable terms—a treat and a week of holidays.

Conferees of both sides then meet and negotiate; the master finds their terms excessive; he refuses to bow to them. Then the war is resumed. The besieged remove the benches from the barricaded door and capture the recalcitrant master in one swift charge. A prisoner in their hands, he learns that if he persists in his folly he will be ducked in cold water. This threat convinces him; he yields to the demands; he sends a messenger off for apples and cider and perhaps whisky; the cold war is brought to an end.
Merriment fills both victors and vanquished; the holidays are spent in rural sports and manly amusements that obliterate all recollection of past differences between master and mastered. When books are reopened, each one quietly and cheerfully resumes his proper position in school. The master becomes master again and the late rebels return to their allegiance. After a pleasant relaxation from their duties they are anxious to return to them with profit and diligence.